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251407Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 002065

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/ACE, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: COE DELEGATION TO OBSERVE IN LESS THAN 5 PERCENT
OF POLLING PLACES

REF: YEREVAN 2061

Classified By: DCM A.F.Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

1. (C) Supporters and opponents of Armenia's November 27 referendum have shifted their focus to the capital in the final days before the ballot. Competing rallies have drawn lower-than-expected attendance and there have been few reports of confrontation. While most political observers expect irregularities as votes are cast, documenting these irregularities will be difficult. The Council of Europe's election observation commission -- just ten observers in all and the only official international observers for the referendum -- told us that they will only be able to cover an estimated 120 polling places during this weekend's balloting. The GOAM claims, however, that it has registered 16,000 local observers for the election. It is not yet clear exactly how many votes are needed for a "yes" win as the Central Election Commission has not yet posted the total number of voters registered. With such a weak international component of official observers, it will take longer than usual to reach a judgment about the conduct of the ballot. We understand the EU presidency plans to delay issuance of a statement until November 29; we propose that it would be prudent to wait as well. End Summary.

DELEGATION CAN ONLY HIT 120 POLLING STATIONS

2. (C) According to the Tomas Jirsa, head of the Council of Europe's (CoE) election observation mission, the CoE teams will only be able to cover less than five percent of polling places (an estimated 120 stations) during the November 27 referendum on constitutional amendments. The ten-person CoE delegation arrived late November 24 and is meeting with GOAM officials and political figures in advance of this weekend's vote. The Ambassador participated in a briefing together with local embassies in an effort to bring the delegation up to speed on the political atmosphere and technical preparations for the election. We have obtained a copy of the delegation's 25-point observation questionnaire that they created from larger OSCE observation documents. Jirsa said the delegation will hold a press conference on November 28 (1400hrs local time) to make a statement on their findings.

CEC STILL WILL NOT GIVE AN OFFICIAL TOTAL REGISTERED VOTERS

3. (C) Armenia's Central Election Commission told us that they have accredited 16,000 observers for this weekend's referendum. The CEC delayed the widely-anticipated announcement of the official total number of registered voters against which the threshold for passage will be calculated (ref) until late on November 26.

RALLIES ATTRACT HUNDREDS, NOT THOUSANDS

4. (C) Rallies planned for November 24 and 25 in downtown Yerevan have proven mostly uneventful, although the opposition accused law enforcement officials of provoking a violent scuffle in the Yerevan district of Malatia-Sebastia late November 24. The local press reports that a man was hospitalized as a result of the incident. The opposition supporter claims he was beaten by police while the police claim he was resisting arrest. We observed protesters in the hundreds during peaceful events on November 24 and 25 that included an automobile caravan through downtown Yerevan and an open-air meeting. These numbers contradicted earlier claims by opposition leaders (made in the press and to us privately) predicting that thousands of supporters would meet for the pre-vote protests.

5. (C) The government announced that Opera Square -- the site of large protest rallies in 2003 and 2004 -- was booked

for 72 hours of concerts dedicated to the "Yes" campaign from November 27-29. Opponents of the referendum will either have to move their gatherings away from the center or risk giving the GOAM a way to declare their event illegal.

Comment

16. (C) With so few international observers accredited, it will be difficult to come quickly to an objective view about the conduct of the referendum. The most authoritative local observer group, the NDI-supported "It's Your Choice" NGO plans to wait until Tuesday, November 29 to make a statement to the press. The UK Charge told us that he will delay an EU statement until November 29 as well, but is not sure that he will be able to restrain all of his colleagues. While there will be strong demand from the press for the U.S. to make a statement on November 28, we believe it would be best to wait until all reports are in.
EVANS